

the Secure Rural Schools program. In over 700 counties and 41 States, timber was once an economic engine, supporting tens of thousands of jobs while keeping critical government operations going strong in these communities that house tax-exempt Federal land.

However, in recent decades, restrictive forest management regulations, combined with devastating partisan environmental campaigns, has resulted in access to our Federal forests being cut off, blocking any economic activity opportunities.

Rural counties do not want to come to Congress every year to beg for money they should be getting to generate in their own backyards anyway. Money that should come from Federal and State land, though it may take up most of their county, now generates no economic value for them.

Reauthorizing Secure Rural Schools is very important and will provide, though not a permanent solution, at least a temporary one until we get back to the wise management of our Federal lands instead of watching them burn each fall, as we see in the news. We can't sit back and watch rural communities suffer until we wake up to that reality.

As Congress works to implement commonsense forest management policies, it is imperative we keep the Secure Rural Schools program in place so rural communities will have the funding for schools and roads that they need.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 5 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 2 o'clock and 9 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1700

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Ms. CHENEY) at 5 p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote incurs objection under clause 6 of rule XX.

The House will resume proceedings on postponed questions at a later time.

VETERANS EXPANDED TRUCKING OPPORTUNITIES ACT OF 2017

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2547) to expand the Department of Veterans Affairs

medical professionals who may qualify to perform physical examinations on eligible veterans and issue medical certificates required for operation of a commercial motor vehicle, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2547

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Veterans Expanded Trucking Opportunities Act of 2017".

SEC. 2. MEDICAL CERTIFICATE FOR VETERANS OPERATING COMMERCIAL MOTOR VEHICLES.

(a) *QUALIFIED EXAMINERS.*—Section 5403(d)(2) of the FAST Act (49 U.S.C. 31149 note; 129 Stat. 1548) is amended to read as follows:

"(2) *QUALIFIED EXAMINER.*—The term "qualified examiner" means an individual who—

"(A) is employed in the Department of Veterans Affairs as an advanced practice nurse, doctor of chiropractic, doctor of medicine, doctor of osteopathy, physician assistant, or other medical professional;

"(B) is licensed, certified, or registered in a State to perform physical examinations;

"(C) is familiar with the standards for, and physical requirements of, an operator required to be medically certified under section 31149 of title 49, United States Code; and

"(D) has never, with respect to such section, been found to have acted fraudulently, including by fraudulently awarding a medical certificate."

(b) *CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.*—Section 5403 of the FAST Act (49 U.S.C. 31149 note; 129 Stat. 1548) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)—

(A) by striking "physician-approved veteran operator," and inserting "veteran operator approved by a qualified examiner,"; and

(B) by striking "qualified physician" and inserting "qualified examiner";

(2) in subsection (b)(1)—

(A) by striking "the physician" and inserting "the examiner"; and

(B) by striking "qualified physician" and inserting "qualified examiner";

(3) in subsection (c)—

(A) by striking "qualified physicians" and inserting "qualified examiners"; and

(B) by striking "such physicians" and inserting "such examiners"; and

(4) in subsection (d)(1)—

(A) in the paragraph heading by striking "PHYSICIAN-APPROVED VETERAN OPERATOR" and inserting "VETERAN OPERATOR APPROVED BY A QUALIFIED EXAMINER"; and

(B) by striking "physician-approved veteran operator" and inserting "veteran operator approved by a qualified examiner".

(c) *RULEMAKING.*—The amendments made by this section shall be incorporated into any rulemaking proceeding related to section 5403 of the FAST Act (49 U.S.C. 31149 note; 129 Stat. 1548) that is being conducted as of the date of enactment of this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GRAVES) and the gentleman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Missouri.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative

days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 2547, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Missouri?

There was no objection.

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, the Fixing of America's Surface Transportation Act, or the FAST Act, created a process only for doctors at the Department of Veterans Affairs to qualify to perform physical examinations on eligible veterans and then issue the medical certificates that are required in order to operate a commercial vehicle.

H.R. 2547 would expand who is eligible for the process to all VA medical professionals as long as they are authorized by the State in which they are licensed, certified, and registered to perform physical examinations and they meet other requirements.

H.R. 2547 would ensure that the list of eligible medical professionals within the VA matches the list of eligible medical professionals that can become certified under the traditional FMCSA process.

This is a bipartisan bill. It is going to ease the regulatory burdens that help create employment opportunities for our veterans.

Madam Speaker, I would urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2547, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. NORTON. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 2547. This bill is another of our efforts to help tackle the longstanding commercial driver shortage and support veterans at the same time as they transition from military to civilian life.

H.R. 2547 will ensure that all qualified medical professionals employed by the Veterans Administration can perform commercial driver physical examinations for their veteran patients.

The medical professionals that this bill addresses are already eligible to become certified medical examiners. This bill simply allows them to utilize the alternative certification process for VA-employed physicians that is currently being finalized by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

Unfortunately, the most recent available data shows that, of the 54,000 medical professionals listed on FMCSA's national registry of certified medical examiners, only 25 are employed by the VA. The online training and testing system being developed by FMCSA and the VA should help remedy this situation. This bill will allow more caregivers to use this new resource.

This bill is consistent with the intent of the FAST Act, which was the product of a strong bipartisan process here in the House of Representatives. FMCSA, in consultation with the VA,

has done a good job creating an alternative process that will eventually allow more VA doctors to become certified medical examiners, while maintaining the safety and integrity of the certification system. Allowing VA medical professionals to utilize online training and testing will make it easier for them to obtain certification, while ensuring they are familiar with the specific medical standards required for commercial drivers.

Though the FAST Act used the word “physicians,” the process that FMCSA has outlined should also be available for use by VA-employed nurse practitioners, chiropractors, physician assistants, and other qualified medical professionals. This bill ensures that they are eligible to use that process.

Madam Speaker, I support this legislation and strongly urge its adoption, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Madam Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. WOODALL).

Mr. WOODALL. Madam Speaker, I want to thank the chairman for yielding me the time, and I want to thank him for his leadership.

Madam Speaker, the amendment that you mentioned, the bill as amended, was actually an amendment from the chairman to perfect the bill. I want to thank the ranking member for her support on the committee, and I want to thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. BROWNLEY) for her work on the amendment.

Madam Speaker, I wish more high schoolers were in the Capitol today. I wish there were more American Government students in the Capitol today, because this amendment is exactly the way that the American people expect the process to work.

As the ranking member pointed out, we made a great step in the FAST Act to try to put more veterans to work, to try to fill more empty spots in commercial truck driving. We did a great job together in a bipartisan way.

A lot of folks do a job, and then they are embarrassed to admit that they didn't get it done 100 percent. We have had folks come into our offices who said: Listen, you have made a great step to help our veterans access these certifications, but you could do more, and let us tell you how.

As the ranking member pointed out, as the chairman pointed out, before the FMCSA has even finished the original regulations, we are back at work perfecting this, adding more healthcare providers to the rolls so that more veterans can get to work faster—not because we are particularly brilliant folks up here, but because folks who do this every single day as a job back home noticed it, told us how we could do it better, and then we created the partnerships up here to make it happen.

Madam Speaker, it makes me so proud to be associated with folks like the chairman, like the ranking member, the Transportation Committee in

general, showing up every single day to see what we can do to make a difference. It is not a difference for 300 million Americans at the time, but if you were that one veteran who is trying to feed your family, who is trying to get your certification, who is trying to get yourself back to work, this bill could make all the difference; this amendment could make all the difference. I am grateful to the entire committee team of members and team of staff for making that possible.

Ms. NORTON. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Seldom do we get to do two good things at one time, and that is exactly what this bill does. Anything we can do for our veterans is not enough. This bill focuses on them.

Remember, they have been in the armed services driving trucks. When they come home, they probably have had the best training in the entire universe. Our country will gain much not only by putting them to work, but by using their training.

On our committee, we have long struggled with an issue that we still have not, indeed, conquered, and that is the difficulty of getting people to drive commercial trucks. This is one of the hardest jobs in America. You are spending time away from your family. You sometimes are gone not only overnight, but more than that.

It has been difficult to get people to do this indispensable job for our country and for the trucking industry. Madam Speaker, I am particularly pleased that Mr. GRAVES and I have been able to find this new way to both aid the industry and help out veterans.

Madam Speaker, I do not have any more speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Madam Speaker, with that, I would urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this important piece of legislation.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GRAVES) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2547, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Madam Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

DISASTER ASSISTANCE SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITIES AND HOMEOWNERS ACT OF 2017

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1684) to direct

the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency to provide technical assistance to common interest communities regarding eligibility for disaster assistance, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1684

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Disaster Assistance Support for Communities and Homeowners Act of 2017”.

SEC. 2. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

(a) *TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.*—The Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency shall provide technical assistance to a common interest community that provides essential services of a governmental nature on actions that a common interest community may take in order to be eligible to receive reimbursement from a grantee that receives funds from the Agency for certain activities performed after an event that results in a disaster declaration.

(b) *RECOMMENDATIONS.*—Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Administrator shall provide to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate a legislative proposal on how to provide eligibility for disaster assistance with respect to common areas of condominiums and housing cooperatives.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GRAVES) and the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Missouri.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 1684, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Missouri?

There was no objection.

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, the Disaster Assistance Support for Communities and Homeowners Act of 2017 would allow FEMA to provide technical assistance to some community associations regarding their application for disaster assistance. The bill also seeks recommendations from FEMA on how condos and co-ops may be eligible for disaster funds to repair common areas which are affected by these disasters.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. NADLER) for working with the committee on this issue. The House passed similar language last year as part of the FEMA Disaster Assistance Reform Act.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. NORTON. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.